

THE CALIFORNIA FARM VISION

I have been an agricultural lender for 26 years in California. I have seen many adversities that have beset the California farmer. These include crop freezes, untimely heat waves, flooding, wildfires, pest and disease invasions, drought and water shortages, rising operating costs, subsidized global competition, labor shortages, poor USDA response to market and free trade agreements, over zealous environmentalists, complacent politicians, and urban encroachment. I have also seen these farmers working to survive these issues with improved irrigation practices, reduction of chemical spraying, increasing yields, excellent land management practices, good cooperation with urban neighbors, participation in the political leadership, and awareness of environmentally safe programs.

The following is more of an essential philosophy in order to research the details to implement vision ideas.

My vision is to see a vibrant, profitable, and sustainable agricultural community within each farming area and adaptable to various commodity groups. Whereas, California farm products will be in high demand for the quantity, quality, safety, and reliability that is envious of all other producing areas of the world. The California Ag industry will be proudly affirmed of knowing, and consumers recognize, that they produce the best product under the highest standards and should demand a higher percentage of the food dollar.

The biggest challenge in achieving the vision is to change the unresponsive political leadership that continually ignores the need for a stable and high quality US commodity market. The US government has no self promotion for the benefits of maintaining the viability of top quality Ag products. Agricultural products have been the political football in foreign trade negotiations that reduces the competitiveness of the US farming sector. Ignorance of unregulated free trade and imports of pests and disease has reduced the US farming acreage that can not be replaced. This has set into motion the likelihood of our dependency on food imports from countries that significantly deplete and pollute its own resources for the profitable export market to feed an increasing world population.

The public perception is that food should be a cheap grocery item with all products provided all year round, ignore seasonality, and bear no price increases no matter the farming costs. There is no hesitation to buy cheap, ignore the quality, or ingest foods of unknown origins and cultural practices. The public perception of farm ownership is an increasing trend to large “corporate” farms. The reduction of the small family farms does not mean that the remaining viable larger farms are not still family owned. There are very few non-ag corporations interested in investing or starting a farming operation. It is not a Wall Street driven industry, but a livelihood of land husbandry, family, and community growth.

The “must have” in an Ag Vision in California is to create the public and political beliefs that the farming sector is an important part of our economy, quality of life,

environment, and a safe guard for a reliable food source. Further understanding that “Farmers” and their farming operations are not a renewable resource. They must be cared for as any Endangered Species. There should be better governmental support of positive agriculture policies, food inspections, and global influences on market prices. The deadly affliction of ignoring unreliable and cheap imports that are not held to the same high standards as California farm products will continue to permanently replace the American Farmer as a supplier to the US food chain.

The State’s aging water system, stalemated policies, and over protective Endangered Species Act must be improved and met with compromise from all sides to insure an innovative supply and the recharge of quality water resources for Agriculture and Urban uses. Land uses and subdivision of large farming parcels must meet reliable water availability and recharge guidelines in the most severe projected climatic conditions. Conveyance of imported water is not a reliable source in the present political environment.

Pollution control must be fairly implemented against all sources of pollution. Recognize that households place more pollutants in the environment on a daily basis than farming practices. It is not acceptable to target and inflict public pressure on Agricultural policy, spraying, fertilizers, and land/waste management practices with questionable scientific studies manipulated for the convenience of the overzealous environmentalists. Apply these same pressures and standards on the consumers as a condition to implement restrictions and policy changes. Let’s see if the mandated changes in the handling of household medications, chemicals, waste disposal, water-electrical-fuel consumption, and property rights will be tolerated as they have been in the farming sector.

The consumers must realize that the convenience of grocery store food has created a significant margin and opposite trends between grocery prices and the prices received by the farmer. The 200% to 4,000% mark up in grocery foods is a result of nothing more than the branding, marketing, and operations of the manufactured product or grocery facility. Farm prices may in fact be trending downward while the consumer prices increase. The result is that the farmer gets significantly less of the rising food dollar and the consumer is only receiving a small convenience for the higher prices. Farmer’s Markets are a mythical replacement of grocery store produce in ALL urban areas, but a thought nonetheless and enjoyed in Ventura County.

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